

Chapter 3

Vision, Goals, and Planning Principles

Introduction

The Decatur County Comprehensive Plan is intended as a working community document. A combination of long and short-term goals, this document is intended to serve as a guide for future development decisions so that the county may realize its vision for the future. The following goals and planning principles are deliberately broad in nature and relate to a vision that answers the question, “Where do we want to go?” The objectives and action steps provided in Chapter 9, are intended to guide the day-to-day decision-making concerning more specific actions. These short-term action steps say, “given our long-term goals and changing community conditions, these are the projects and programs that we want to complete in the short-term, and this is how we plan to accomplish them.”

The following Vision, Goals, and Planning Principles were developed through a series of key stakeholder interviews and public workshops, and steering committee meetings. This Chapter serves as Decatur County’s foundation as it strives to meet the needs and capitalize on opportunities relating to growth management, transportation and public facilities.

Decatur County Vision Statement

Decatur County, home of the Tower Tree, will maintain our small town charm and rural character. While we embrace our new status as a regional employment center, we recognize the importance of promoting growth, managing change, and capitalizing on the advances agriculture can yield. Our strong identity as a farming community is reflected in our commitment to be good stewards of the land in order to protect and enhance the quality of life for all our residents and future generations.

Growth Management Goals

Create a range of housing choices in appropriate areas

Encourage the development of quality neighborhoods

Protect the county’s agricultural resources and promote the expansion of the local agricultural economy

Encourage commercial and industrial development in appropriate areas that supports continued growth in the community

Transportation Goals

Create a range of quality transportation opportunities throughout the community

Encourage roadway improvements that appropriately accommodate the movement of farm equipment

Foster roadway design that supports a variety of users

Public Facilities Goal

Maximize infrastructure investment through promotion of compact development served by adequate public facilities

Planning Principles

The planning principles are sound principles of community planning and development selected from a variety of sources. The principles were presented to the steering committee along with the supplementary supporting points. The planning principles were translated into the goals for the plan.

Traditional Communities

Create a range of housing choices and opportunities in locations where the infrastructure is adequate

- An aging baby-boom population will create demand for low-maintenance, single story homes
- Young professionals and empty nesters are drawn to creative or unique spaces, such as condos or apartments above downtown businesses in the small towns
- Executive housing helps keep the local management and professionals involved in the local community
- Families tend to prefer well-designed, affordable homes (generally single-family) in neighborhoods with sidewalks, parks, and access to schools and neighborhood retail
- Advances in technology and telecommuting have increased the demand for live-over-work housing units with office or retail on the first floor and residential space above
- Through proper planning, communities are able to provide for attractive, well-designed, well-constructed affordable housing

Create Walkable Neighborhoods with a discernable center that is within a 15 minute walk from all dwellings and connections to other neighborhoods and key places in the County

- Neighborhoods with safe pedestrian connections provide children and others that are less-mobile with the opportunity for greater independence, reducing the community's dependency on the automobile
- Neighborhoods with safe pedestrian networks provide opportunities for exercise and increase physical fitness and overall health
- Well defined neighborhood centers, such as parks, provide opportunities for people to gather and children to play
- Strategically located neighborhood centers reduce the community's dependence on the automobile
- Neighborhoods with sidewalks and well defined, strategically located neighborhood centers are often catalysts for the development of tightly knit social groups

Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place (design aesthetics, restrictive covenants and discourage mobile homes outside mobile home parks)

- Public spaces that are well defined and strategically distributed contribute to the community's overall quality of life
- Civic buildings that are prominent, attractive, and functional promote community pride and foster identity based on place
- Distinctive communities have a discernable identity and attract investment
- Architectural design and site layout are two of the most common ways to foster a unique sense of place and add to the value of real estate

Encourage a mix of complimentary land uses while avoiding known nuisances

- Mixed uses can reduce both the number of vehicle trips and the length of the trips taken
- Permitting appropriate residential uses in what would otherwise be a commercial area can increase the viability of the area and its businesses by creating additional demand for goods and services after hours
- Complimentary uses located in the same district, for example residential uses and downtown commercial uses, adds to the vitality of the district
- A well planned community will typically avoid conflicts between incompatible uses (such as residential uses and stock yards) without hindering the development of either in the future
- Neighborhood commercial and retail establishments which cater to residents' day-to-day needs eliminate unnecessary vehicle trips to the regional commercial centers of the community

Encourage small playgrounds that are accessible to homes

- Children can play and socialize at neighborhood parks
- There is no need to drive to a playground if parks are readily accessible; reducing the community's dependency on the automobile and increasing the opportunities for those who are less mobile

Promote natural resources, green spaces, and recreational resources

- Preserving and protecting open space enhances the community's overall quality of life
- Protecting critical environmental areas such as riparian corridors and flood plains adds to the community's natural environment, while protecting the environment and preventing loss of personal property and life during natural disasters
- Enhancing natural beauty by balancing the hardscape (e.g. parking lots, larger buildings) of the built environment through the incorporation of softscape elements, or landscaping, can improve the aesthetic quality of new development
- Providing for and protecting the habitats of plants and animals demonstrates environmental responsibility for future generations
- Use of high impact, low-maintenance, non-invasive native planting materials contributes to the sustainability, authenticity and natural beauty of the community

Preserve and enhance open space, farmland, natural beauty, viewsheds, and critical environmental areas

- Unlike conventional subdivision development and the stripping out of county roads, conservation subdivision development provides for the subdivision of land without compromising the scenic qualities, the character, or the ecological benefits of the rural countryside while protecting farmland and access
- In areas where conservation subdivision development is not feasible or desired, the technique of clustering subdivisions can be employed to maximize the efficiency of infrastructure installation and maintenance while preserving the rural setting
- A "right-to-farm" statement which is signed by anyone purchasing and/or developing land which has recently been subdivided and is adjacent to farming operations recognizes the importance of agriculture of the community while accommodating the development of land

Promote agriculture, protect farmland, and protect the rural economy

- Promoting farming as a credible business enterprise can serve to elevate the profession locally and encourage future generations to continue farming
- Agri-businesses benefit a community by expanding the economic impact of farming vertically and creating jobs in the community
- Limiting rural development in areas with tillable land and directing such development toward rural areas with topography less desirable for farming can promote both farming and rural living
- By planning for and guiding both the quantity and location of growth, a community can effectively protect its farmland without hindering growth and progress

Encourage development patterns that build on existing infrastructure and population centers (infill development), including remediation and redevelopment of Brownfields; existing and future

- Infill and Brownfield redevelopment capitalize on the presence of existing infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and roads
- The redevelopment of vacant, abandoned or underutilized properties supports surrounding property values
- Placing active uses on vacant, abandoned, or underutilized sites returns them to the tax rolls or to service for the public good

Minimize the spread of low density, non-contiguous development by encouraging new development to be of an appropriate intensity and to be served by adequate public facilities

- Low-density, non-contiguous, poorly connected development is expensive to serve with respect to both capital and non-capital services, including but not limited to: water, sewer, fire, police and emergency services
- The costs to expand services, utilities and infrastructure is often heavily subsidized by existing residents in developed areas of the community in the form of higher utility rates and taxes
- Compact development placed on a grid street pattern, or altered grid pattern, minimizes the number of vehicle trips and length of trips
- Future development can be directed to the most desirable areas with enough foresight with respect to public investments in infrastructure
- Directing growth to areas that are already served by adequate public facilities reduces the cost of providing services to what are otherwise remote, or isolated locations

New investment along highway corridors should complement investment in existing community business centers

- The developments and uses along a community's highway corridors (e.g. US 421, SR 46, SR 3 and I-74) are the first impression visitors have of the community.
- Leapfrog development that skips over opportunities for infill development harms the community by leaving empty spaces perpetuating blight and creating eyesores
- Public investment in highway corridor improvements often spurs private investment in the form of business development between a community's primary gateways

Provide a variety of transportation choices

- On-call, or demand responsive, public transportation systems provide mobility opportunities for the less mobile: specifically, the elderly and disabled
- Opportunities for non-motorized transportation can be incorporated into new road corridors and retrofitted into existing corridors
- Integrating opportunities for bicycle transportation with bicycle parking at stores, restaurants, and public buildings encourages use of bicycles. Bicycle tag programs increase the safety of parking bikes in public
- Transportation systems should be designed and operated in a way that is safe and provides access and ease of movement for every County resident
- Accommodations for movement of farm equipment, where applicable, is vital for the safety of motorists and farmers and the vitality of the County's agricultural sector
- Incorporating the use of traffic calming devices including, but not necessarily limited to: changes in pavement materials; and the use of medians and roundabouts, improves the safety and thus the quality of life experienced by County residents

Streets form a connected network

- Vehicle miles traveled can be reduced because there are numerous direct routes to any given destination
- Residents and businesses throughout the County are able to realize a decrease in insurance costs as a result of improved response times by emergency personnel, specifically fire personnel and equipment, due to increased access
- Residents, and perhaps more importantly children, can walk between neighborhoods without encountering vehicular traffic
- Make neighborhoods safer places to live and play and reduce traffic traveling in front of homes by employing the use of the traditional

street grid or orthogonal street patterns and discouraging the use of isolated cul-de-sacs

- Linking amenities such as parks, trail heads, town plazas, and educational institutions can create a viable pedestrian and bicycle network

The number and frequency of automobile access driveways along road corridors should be minimized

- Access management improves traffic flow by minimizing the number of places where traffic slows for turning movements
- Shared parking, shared driveways and inter-connected parcels minimize unnecessary burdens placed on the larger transportation network as traffic moves between businesses

Accommodations for the movement of farm equipment where appropriate

- Farmers traversing county roads can be made safer by posting signs indicating that slow-moving farm equipment is present and reducing the posted speed limit
- Farmers should have relatively frequent and safe access across major highways
- The ingress and egress drives of farms should be adequately marked and identified; much like a hidden drive or church or cemetery entrance/exit
- Passing blisters should be installed and maintained in areas where motorists are unable to lawfully pass for long distances

Site Layout and Aesthetics

- Buildings, be they residential, commercial or industrial, should be required to address the street (not turn their back on the street and its pedestrian environment), through their orientation and façade treatments.

This page intentionally left blank.